

5: Bates N-5 (1848-1859) 1892

SQ20 Tucuna SQ20

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THE NATURALIST
ON
THE RIVER AMAZONS.

A RECORD OF ADVENTURES, HABITS OF ANIMALS, SKETCHES OF BRAZILIAN
AND INDIAN LIFE, AND ASPECTS OF NATURE UNDER THE EQUATOR,
DURING ELEVEN YEARS OF TRAVEL.

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WITH MAP AND NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS.

[title page]
[p. iii]

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which the village is built extends on one side nearly a mile into the forest, but on the other side the descent into the lowland begins close to the streets; the hill sloping abruptly towards a boggy meadow surrounded by woods, through which a narrow winding path continues the slope down to a cool shady glen, with a brook of icy-cold water flowing at the bottom. At mid-day the vertical sun penetrates into the gloomy depths of this romantic spot, lighting up the leafy banks of the rivulet and its clean sandy margins, where numbers of scarlet, green, and black tanagers and brightly-coloured butterflies sport about in the stray beams. Sparkling brooks, large and small, traverse the glorious forest in almost every direction, and one is constantly meeting, whilst rambling through the thickets, with trickling rills and bubbling springs, so well provided is the country with moisture. Some of the rivulets flow over a sandy and pebbly bed, and the banks of all are clothed with the most magnificent vegetation conceivable. I had the almost daily habit, in my solitary walks, of resting on the clean banks of these swift-flowing streams, and bathing for an hour at a time in their bracing waters; hours which now remain amongst my most pleasant memories. The broad forest roads continue, as I was told, a distance of several days' journey into the interior, which is peopled by Tucúnas and other Indians, living in scattered houses and villages nearly in their primitive state, the nearest village lying about six miles from St. Paulo. The banks of all the streams are dotted with palm-thatched dwellings of Tucúnas, all half buried in the leafy wilderness, the scattered families having chosen the coolest and shadiest nooks for their abodes.

I frequently heard in the neighbourhood of these huts the "realejo" or organ bird (*Cyphorhinus cantans*), the most remarkable songster, by far, of the Amazonian forests. When its singular notes strike the ear for the first time the impression cannot be resisted that they are produced by a human voice. Some musical boy must be gathering fruit in the thickets, and is singing a few notes to cheer himself. The tones become more fluty and plaintive; they are now those of a flageolet, and notwithstanding the utter impossibility of the thing, one is for the moment convinced that somebody is playing that instrument. No bird is to be seen, however closely the surrounding trees and bushes may be scanned, and yet the voice seems to come from the thicket close to one's ears. The ending of the song is rather disappointing. It begins with a few very slow and mellow notes, following each other like the commencement of an air; one listens expecting to hear a complete strain, but an abrupt pause occurs, and then the song breaks down, finishing with a number of clicking unmusical sounds like a piping barrel organ out of wind and tune. I never heard the bird on the Lower Amazons, and very rarely heard it even at Ega; it is the only songster which makes an impression on the natives, who sometimes rest their paddles whilst travelling in their small canoes along the shady by-streams, as if struck by the mysterious sounds.

- 17) The Tucúna Indians are a tribe resembling much the Shumánas,
 18) Passés, Jurís, and Mauhés in their physical appearance and customs.
 They lead, like those tribes, a settled agricultural life, each horde obeying

a chief of more or less influence, according to his energy and ambition, 171
and possessing its pajé or medicine man, who fosters its superstitions; 181
but they are much more idle and debauched than other Indians belong-
ing to the superior tribes. They are not so warlike and loyal as the
Mundurucús, although resembling them in many respects, nor have they
the slender figures, dignified mien, and gentle disposition of the Passés;
there are, however, no trenchant points of difference to distinguish them
from these highest of all the tribes. Both men and women are tattooed, 304
the pattern being sometimes a scroll on each cheek, but generally rows
of short straight lines on the face. Most of the older people wear brace- 301
lets, anklets, and garters of tapir-hide or tough bark; in their homes they 291
wear no other dress except on festival days, when they ornament them-
selves with feathers or masked cloaks made of the inner bark of a tree.
They were very shy when I made my first visits to their habitations in 609
the forest, all scampering off to the thicket when I approached, but on
subsequent days they became more familiar, and I found them a harm-
less, good-natured people.

A great part of the horde living at the first Maloca or village dwell in 342
a common habitation, a large oblong hut built and arranged inside with
such a disregard of all symmetry, that it appeared as though constructed 621
by a number of hands, each working independently, stretching a rafter
or fitting in a piece of thatch, without reference to what his fellow-
labourers were doing. The walls as well as the roof are covered with
thatch of palm-leaves; each piece consisting of leaflets plaited and
attached in a row to a lath many feet in length. Strong upright posts
support the roof, hammocks being slung between them, leaving a free
space for passage and for fires in the middle, and on one side is an elevated
stage (*girao*) overhead, formed of split palm-stems. The Tucúnas excel 323
most of the other tribes in the manufacture of pottery. They make 415
broad-mouthed jars, for Tucupí sauce, caysúma or mandioca beer,
capable of holding twenty or more gallons, ornamenting them outside
with crossed diagonal streaks of various colours. These jars, with cook-
ing-pots, smaller jars for holding water, blow-pipes, quivers, matirí bags * 352
full of small articles, baskets, skins of animals, and so forth, form the
principal part of the furniture of their huts, both large and small. The
dead bodies of their chiefs are interred, the knees doubled up, in large 766
jars under the floors of their huts.

The semi-religious dances and drinking bouts usual amongst the 273
settled tribes of Amazonian Indians are indulged in to greater excess 335
by the Tucúnas than they are by most other tribes. The Juruparí or 776
Demon is the only superior being they have any conception of, and his
name is mixed up with all their ceremonies, but it is difficult to ascertain
what they consider to be his attributes. He seems to be believed in
simply as a mischievous imp, who is at the bottom of all those mishaps

* These bags are formed of remarkably neat twine made of Bromelia fibres 286
elaborately knitted, all in one piece, with sticks; a belt of the same material, but more
closely woven, being attached to the top to suspend them by. They afford good
examples of the mechanical ability of these Indians. The Tucúnas also possess the 281
art of skinning and stuffing birds, the handsome kinds of which they sell in great 439
numbers to passing travellers.

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SQ20 Tucuna SQ20

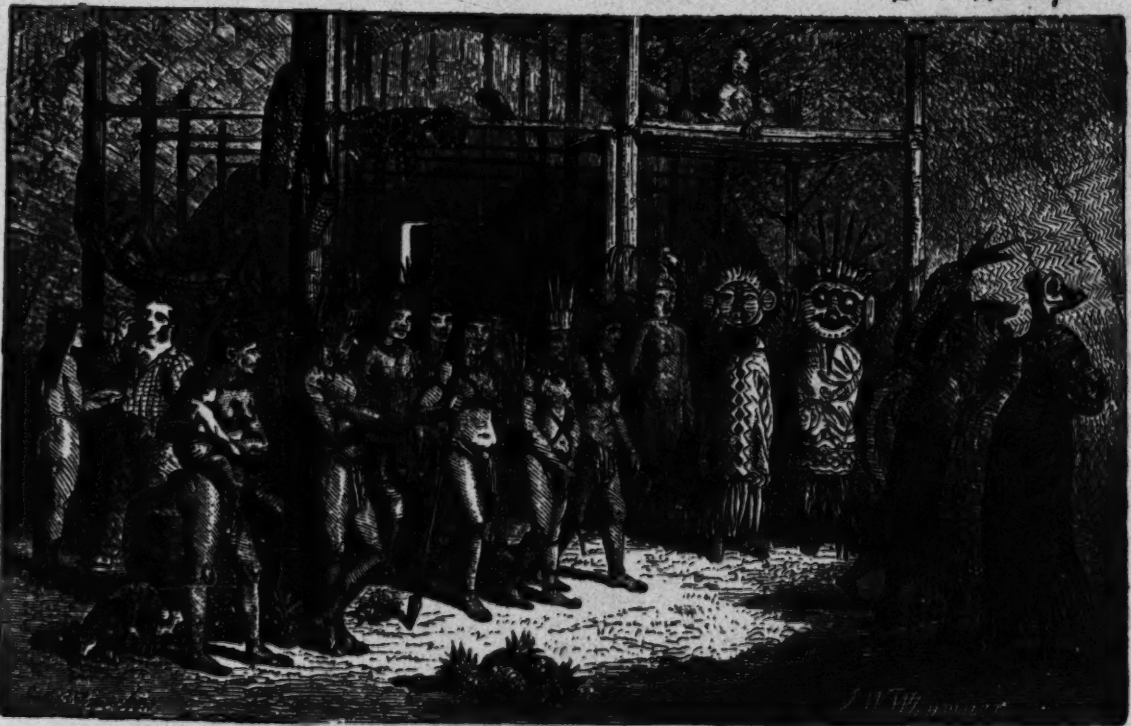
382

EXCURSIONS BEYOND EGA.

CHAP. XIII

776 of their daily life, the causes of which are not very immediate or obvious to their dull understandings. It is vain to try to get information out of

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Masked dance and Wedding-feast of Tucuna Indians.

776 a Tucuna on this subject; they affect great mystery when the name is mentioned, and give very confused answers to questions: it was clear,

however, that the idea of a spirit as a beneficent God or Creator had not entered the minds of these Indians. There is great similarity in all their ceremonies and mummeries, whether the object is a wedding, the celebration of the feast of fruits, the plucking of the hair from the heads of their children, or a holiday got up simply out of a love of dissipation. Some of the tribes on these occasions deck themselves with the bright-coloured feathers of parrots and macaws. The chief wears a head-dress or cap made by fixing the breast-feathers of the Toucan on a web of Bromelia twine, with erect tail plumes of macaws rising from the crown. The cinctures of the arms and legs are also then ornamented with bunches of feathers. Others wear masked dresses: these are long cloaks reaching below the knee, and made of the thick whitish-coloured inner bark of a tree, the fibres of which are interlaced in so regular a manner, that the material looks like artificial cloth. The cloak covers the head; two holes are cut out for the eyes, a large round piece of the cloth stretched on a rim of flexible wood is stitched on each side to represent ears, and the features are painted in exaggerated style with yellow, red, and black streaks. The dresses are sewn into the proper shapes with thread made of the inner bark of the Uaissúma tree. Sometimes grotesque head-dresses, representing monkeys' busts or heads of other animals, made by stretching cloth or skin over a basket-work frame, are worn at these holidays. The biggest and ugliest mask represents the Juruparí. In these festival habiliments the Tucúnas go through their monotonous see-saw and stamping dances, accompanied by singing and drumming, and keep up the sport often for three or four days and nights in succession, drinking enormous quantities of caysúma, smoking tobacco, and snuffing parica powder.

I could not learn that there was any deep symbolical meaning in these masked dances, or that they commemorated any past event in the history of the tribe. Some of them seem vaguely intended as a propitiation of the Juruparí, but the masker who represents the demon sometimes gets drunk along with the rest, and is not treated with any reverence. From all I could make out, these Indians preserve no memory of events going beyond the times of their fathers or grandfathers. Almost every joyful event is made the occasion of a festival: weddings amongst the rest. A young man who wishes to wed a Tucúna girl has to demand her hand of her parents, who arrange the rest of the affair, and fix a day for the marriage ceremony. A wedding which took place in the Christmas week whilst I was at St. Paulo, was kept up with great spirit for three or four days, flagging during the heats of mid-day, but renewing itself with increased vigour every evening. During the whole time the bride, decked out with feather ornaments, was under the charge of the older squaws, whose business seemed to be sedulously to keep the bridegroom at a safe distance until the end of the dreary period of dancing and boosing. The Tucúnas have the singular custom, in common with the Collínas and Maubés, of treating their young girls, on their showing the first signs of womanhood, as if they had committed some crime: They are sent up to the girao under the smoky and filthy roof, and kept there on very meagre diet, sometimes for a whole month. I heard of one poor girl dying under this treatment.

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131 The original territory of the Tucuna tribe embraced the banks of
101 most of the by-streams, from 40 miles below St. Paulo to beyond Loreto in Peru, a distance of about 200 miles; the tribe, however, is not well-demarcated from that of the Collinas, who appear to be a section of Tucunas, and whose home extends 200 miles farther to the east.

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131 The only other tribe of this neighbourhood concerning which I
181 obtained any information were the Majeronas, whose territory embraces several hundred miles of the western bank of the river Jauri, an affluent of the Solimoens, 120 miles beyond St. Paulo. These are a fierce, indomitable, and hostile people, like the Araras of the river Madeira; they are also cannibals. The navigation of the Jauri is rendered impossible on account of the Majeronas lying in wait on its banks to intercept and murder all travellers, especially whites.

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266 Four months before my arrival at St. Paulo, two young half-castes
648 (nearly white) of the village went to trade on the Jauri; the Majeronas having shown signs of abating their hostility for a year or two previously. They had not been long gone, when their canoe returned with the news that the two young fellows had been shot with arrows, roasted, and eaten by the savages. José Patricio, with his usual activity in the cause of law and order, despatched a party of armed men of the National Guard to the place to make inquiries, and, if the murder should appear to be unprovoked, to retaliate. When they reached the settlement of the horde who had eaten the two men, it was found evacuated, with the exception of one girl, who had been in the woods when the rest of her people had taken flight, and whom the guards brought with them to St. Paulo. It was gathered from her, and from other Indians on the Jauri, that the young men had brought their fate on themselves through improper conduct towards the Majerona women. The girl, on arriving at St. Paulo, was taken care of by Senhor José Patricio, baptised under the name of Maria, and taught Portuguese. I saw a good deal of her, for my friend sent her daily to my house to fill the water jars, make the fire, and so forth. I also gained her goodwill by extracting the grub of an *Cestrus* fly* from her back, and thus cured her of a painful tumour. She was decidedly the best-humoured and, to all appearance, the kindest-hearted specimen of her race I had yet seen. She was tall and very stout; in colour much lighter than the ordinary Indian tint, and her ways altogether were more like those of a careless, laughing country wench, such as might be met with any day

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[136] * A species of *Cestrus* or gadfly, on the Upper Amazons, fixes on the flesh of man as breeding place for its grub. I extracted five at different times from my own flesh. The first was fixed in the calf of my leg, causing there a suppurating tumour, which, being unaware of the existence of this *Cestrus*, I thought at first was a common boil. The tumour grew and the pain increased until I became quite lame, and then, on carefully examining the supposed boil, I saw the head of a grub moving in a small hole at its apex. The extraction of the animal was a difficult operation, it being an inch in length and of increasing breadth from head to tail, besides being secured to the flesh of the inside of the tumour by two horny hooks. An old Indian of Ega showed me the most effective way of proceeding, which was to stupefy the grub with strong tobacco juice, causing it to relax its grip in the interior, and then pull it out of the narrow orifice of the tumour by main force.

5: Bates N-5 (1848-1859) 1892

SQ20 Tucuna

Mayoruna SE16

CHAP. XIII.

FAILING HEALTH.

385

amongst the labouring class in villages in our own country, than a cannibal. I heard this artless maiden relate, in the coolest manner possible, how she ate a portion of the bodies of the young men whom her tribe had roasted. But what increased greatly the incongruity of this business, the young widow of one of the victims, a neighbour of mine, happened to be present during the narrative, and showed her interest in it by laughing at the broken Portuguese in which the girl related the horrible story. 142
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In the fourth month of my sojourn at St. Paulo I had a serious illness, an attack of the "sizeons," or ague of the country, which, as it left me with shattered health and damped enthusiasm, led to my abandoning the plan I had formed of proceeding to the Peruvian towns of Pebas and Moyobamba, 250 and 600 miles further west, and so completing the examination of the Natural History of the Amazonian plains up to the foot of the Andes. I made a very large collection at St. Paulo, and employed a collector at Tabatinga and on the banks of the Jauri for several months, so that I acquired a very fair knowledge altogether of the productions of the country bordering the Amazons to the end of the Brazilian territory, a distance of 1,900 miles from the Atlantic at the mouth of the Pará; but beyond the Peruvian boundary I found now I should be unable to go. My ague seemed to be the culmination of a gradual deterioration of health, which had been going on for several years. I had exposed myself too much in the sun, working to the utmost of my strength six days a week, and had suffered much, besides, from bad and insufficient food. The ague did not exist at St. Paulo; but the foul and humid state of the village was, perhaps, sufficient to produce ague in a person much weakened from other causes. The country bordering the shores of the Solimoens is healthy throughout; some endemic diseases certainly exist, but these are not of a fatal nature, and the epidemics which desolated the Lower Amazons from Pará to the Rio Negro, between the years 1850 and 1856, had never reached this favoured land. Ague is known only on the banks of those tributary streams which have dark-coloured water. 000

I always carried a stock of medicines with me; and a small phial of quinine, which I had bought at Pará in 1851, but never yet had use for, now came in very useful. I took for each dose as much as would lie on the tip of a penknife-blade, mixing it with warm chamomile tea. The first few days after my first attack I could not stir, and was delirious during the paroxysms of fever; but the worst being over, I made an effort to rouse myself, knowing that incurable disorders of the liver and spleen follow ague in this country if the feeling of lassitude is too much indulged. So every morning I shouldered my gun or insect-net, and went my usual walk in the forest. The fit of shivering very often seized me before I got home, and I then used to stand still and brave it out. When the steamer ascended in January, 1858, Lieutenant Nunes was shocked to see me so much shattered, and recommended me strongly to return at once to Ega. I took his advice, and embarked with him, when he touched at St. Paulo on his downward voyage, on the 2nd of February. I still hoped to be able to turn my face westward